

## take me away from here (i'm feeling this) by edgeoftown

**Category:** IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - 2000s, Alternate Universe - College/University, Banter, Enemies to Friends to Lovers, M/M, Road Trips, Slow Burn, Underage Drinking, i mean barely theyre like 18/19, this is some incredibly niche content but idc

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Urus

**Relationships:** Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

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**Summary:**

There are three things Richie is absolutely certain of.

One: Eddie has to send his shitty girlfriend in Ithaca VHS tapes every other week updating her on his life (and honestly not one bit of that doesn't confuse Richie).

Two: He sent her the wrong VHS tape this week.

Three: He's on Richie's doorstep right now begging him to drive him to Ithaca, even though Eddie can barely stand him, because he needs to go intercept it before she sees it.

or: the Losers go to university in 2006 and also it's loosely based off Road Trip.

## 1. get crunk

Richie finds Bev on the quad, waiting for him with a cigarette tucked behind her ear. Her bangs are manic panic purple today, as are her hands from the dye residue, but her nails are painted a bright orange, same as Richie's. Twinsies! She hasn't spotted him yet, which means he can greet her with some flair.

"Miss Marsh is that a cigarette I see! On school grounds!" He's doing his old British lady voice, which sounds like maybe a ghost in a play for children at best, too heavy on the wavering sort of deathbed-y weakness, not enough of like, The Queen or whatever. He's working on it. She flicks some dirt onto his pants as he sits down, and calls him an idiot but offers him a cigarette still.

"We're literally adults Richie." He snorts at that. When she lifts her zippo to light her smoke he grabs the book peeking out of her opened messenger bag.

"What the fuck is Twilight?"

"It's," she swipes at his arm to get it back but he ducks away, halfway to his feet, "just about vampires and stuff, fuck off," she pulls his leg out from under him and grabs the book from where he drops it to steady himself.

"Vampires huh? Sexy vampires? Is it one of those books?" He does something complicated with his eyebrows, and she swats at him with the book for good measure but rips it away again when he reaches for it, shoving it into the bottom of her bag.

"Just vampires. I don't know it's like sort of a mystery, sort of a horror. Or whatever. It's not like," she pauses to finally light her cigarette after his rude interruption, "I'm not that far into it, anyway, so."

"Okay well let me know when it gets hot and heavy, Bevv. If it makes you wanna y'know, release some tension you know where to find m—" again she throws some ripped up grass and dirt at him. He can imagine how clogged up the washing machine in his res hall's

getting from cleaning all this dirt out of his clothes but what can he say? It's not a good joke until he's physically assaulted for it. (And how often does he really wash his clothing anyway? Only when someone else yells at him for being disgusting, and even then usually only when it's Stan, honestly).

"Oh anyway," Bev says, taking advantage of the fact that Richie's shut up long enough to light his cigarette, "did you watch that Escape the Fate video? The situations one? You like them right?"

"I mean I don't know if I like, like them—"

"Oh, is that why you're trying to look so hard like the lead singer?" she tugs on a longer strand of his hair (straightened obsessively, but messy because god cursed him with curly hair), dyed black recently in his bathroom. Stan had dyed it for him and wore gloves and an apron but didn't put any vaseline along Richie's hairline to protect his skin from the dye because he'd mocked his shoes earlier that morning. Who wears loafers, Stan

"*God* Bev I don't make all my choices because of bands, fuck. I have my own thoughts and shit."

"I was only kidding."

"No, but I wanna look like him, that's the point. Is it working?" He strikes a pose that makes him look like, bad ass or something. Pouty and frown-y all at once, cigarette hanging out his mouth.

She squints her eyes at him, adjusting a fake monocle in front of her eye, says, "You gotta cut the sleeves off your shirt I think."

"Oh positively fabulous advice, Red, I'll surely be the prettiest girl in all the land!" She does a little bow, pretends to take her hat off and hold it against her chest and everything, the image of the perfect gentleman. Sometimes Richie thinks she does better impressions than him and she doesn't even have to use any voices. But then sometimes he'll do a Peter Griffin that's like, so spot on that he can't believe he ever doubted himself.

"So did you watch it or no?" She asks again.

“Nah.” He stubs his cigarette out on the pole he’s leaning against, even though there’s a bit left cause he hates the kill.

“Come pick me up from the library later? I’ll show you then.” He thinks more than anything it’s a way to make him stick around for his next class, which he was definitely going to skip to get high. She’s tricky like that, this Beverly, but he’ll stay.

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CALC 201 is a bore, he only took this class for an easy mark anyway, isn’t expecting much from it. He vandalizes the desk when he can’t focus on the board anymore, and then feels so incredibly juvenile for doing that that he spends the last fifteen minutes of class trying to scrub the *fuck this* he’d written in pen off. It’s only half successful and when he leaves it looks more like a *fucl his* which is better, at least.

Then, on the way up the stairs to the library he passes Greta Keene and The Gang and accidentally makes eye contact with one of her newer friends, Jemma, a girl who grew out of awkward and lanky the summer before senior year of high school, and got her braces taken off and Greta decided she was pretty and clean enough to hang out with. Also, Jemma’s parents are loaded and never let it be said that Greta doesn’t know how to seize a good opportunity when she sees one.

Anyway, she’d invited Richie to the first party she threw as an official Mean Girl. After sitting next to each other in science for two years they were sort of friends, so he showed up and brought her a wine cooler he’d stolen from his mom’s hidden stash in the garage, and him and Jemma had made out for a bit in the back yard behind the shed. Like, she knew it was a faux pas to invite Richie — and be seen with him in general — but still wanted to make out with like, a real live emo boy. Or whatever. He hasn’t interacted with her at all since but it’s still like. Kind weird of awkward. Mostly on her end.

He pulls his phone out of his pocket and texts Bev a *where r u*, mostly to have something else to look at, pretends he doesn’t know the way someone jabs their shoulder into him is intentional. He didn’t even see who it was so really what’s the point, other than that now he smells like glittery body spray from PINK a little bit.

Bev texts *2nd floor back right* just as he's pushing through the turnstiles. He drops his bag on the floor loudly to alert her of his presence and drags a chair over to Bev where she's pulling up youtube on the world's slowest computer. There's a pair of skullcandy head phones plugged in already and she hands him an earbud and a piece of gum. Perfect. This is the kind of library trip Richie can fucking enjoy.

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Richie meets Eddie the first week of freshman year, at some party that Ben invited them to. Ben had tried out for the football team (and did well, obviously) so some of the other football guys had told him to come, and to *bring whoever man it's gonna be a fuckin rager. No prudes though! Haha!* Richie wonders how disappointed the jocks are gonna be when they see them.

They show up kind of late, mostly because it had taken Bev far too long to choose an outfit, switching between her usual floor length Tripp skirt, printed tank top combo, and some low waisted bootlegs with a light blue zip up (borrowed from her roommate). The second choice had been very un-her, but she was toying with the idea of fitting in, just to see what it's like. It had freaked all of them out and made her uncomfortable anyway, so in the end she'd settled on some cargo pants with Richie's chain wallet clipped to the belt loop 'cause "it looks better on me anyway," and she cut the bottom couple inches off a tank top thirty seconds before they left her dorm. Her hair was pulled up in a couple little spiky pig tails, like somewhere in-between weirdo mall goth and cool girl.

They pre on the way there, drinking tequila out of Bev's half full flask, but it's barely enough to get the group of them tipsy. Thank god they brought the beers Stan (perpetually stern faced and adult-like) had managed to fool the liquor store man into selling him while Ben (perpetually baby faced) had waited outside.

It's before midnight still, and the party's still picking up steam. There's only a couple people dancing in the living room (timidly) but there is a raucous game of flip cup going on in the kitchen, with lots of beer on the floor already. Some people are already mentioning keg stands but only in future tense. Sure, once more people show up he's gonna fuckin do it bro but what's the point now? Kasey's not even

gonna see it Bro, and he's trynna tap that ass dude you know?

Richie knows within seconds that he's gonna end up in one of these bedrooms smoking weed out of a strangers bong, and he'll real casual put on some Pink Floyd's The Wall (here's hoping someone has a speaker that'll plug into his Zune). Until then though, there are two beers to drink and maybe even some dancing with Ben and Bev to be done.

He shotguns the first of his two allotted cans, and everyone yells at him for being stupid and gross when half of it ends up on his shirt and converse.

He throws up both middle fingers, still holding the can in one hand, yelling, *Whatever! Beer's disgusting and I'm trying to get fuckin faced tonight!* a bit too loud for the current state of the party and someone turns up Temperature to drown him out. Stan rolls his eyes through a small smile and starts drinking his own beer in earnest, as if that'll make a drunk Richie more bearable, and Bev's grabbing his hand and tugging him to the living room. She'd gotten obsessed with learning the lyrics to this song and knew literally all of it by heart, which was honestly really impressive.

They dance stupid and crazy in the centre of the living room, jumping around and yelling and grabbing on to each other for balance as if they'd been drinking for hours and not about a half hour, right through Temperature, into Crazy by Gnarles Barkley (who's name is so fucking cool is should just be part of the song name), and Dirty Little Secret (even though Richie honestly kind of thinks they're posers), but then someone puts on Maroon 5 and that's where Richie draws the fucking line. He pushes over to the table in the corner housing the huge speakers and someone's laptop plugged into them (brave? stupid? up to you) and before anyone can see him and complain he's changed it to HOLLERTILYOUPASSOUT, absolutely delighting in the groan that goes through the room.

Even more when some 5'6" prep rushes up to him and pushes his shoulder.

"What the fuck man? I just put on that song!"

"It was Maroon 5. No one wants to listen to that shit." Richie smiles, all teeth. He swears he can already see steam coming out of this guys ears.

"No one wants to listen to this either what the fuck is- like it's so bad it's not even fucking- It's not music! It's just noise!" He's a sputtering animated sort of angry, waving his arms and his drink sloshes out of the red solo cup a little. Richie might be a little in love already. "And Maroon 5 is one of the best bands on the radio right now I don't care what you say." Actually love might be too strong a word to use on someone who likes Maroon fucking 5.

"Baby, please, 3OH!3," he does the symbol with his hands here, just to see how the guy reacts, "are lyrical geniuses. Musical prodigies. Fucking, sex gods, man. They're actually better than The Beatles."

The prep stops in his track like someone's hit pause on him. He presses his fingers to his temple, staring somewhere just past Richie's shoulders. He processes the cold hard facts Richie's just presented for a solid five seconds, then brings his hand down from his face so violently that Richie flinches, and then laughs at himself for being afraid of the worlds smallest man. This only infuriates him more.

"First of all, asshole, that's just so not true that there's no way even *you* actually believe that, second you're probably losing your hearing from all the screamo shit I'm sure you listen to," he gestures towards Richie's very skinny women's jeans and beat up chucks as he says this, "not to mention braincells, if you think this is better than— if you think this is good, full stop." He shakes his head and takes another sip from his drink like, *I'm done with this*. He can pretend DON'T TRUST ME wasn't the best pop song of the decade all he wants but Richie knows even this prep would've screamed along to that. He is... endlessly frustrated. Also, sort of turned on? Any attention is good attention, apparently.

"Listen cutie you can shit on them all you want but you know at the end of the day 3OH!3 gets people in the moooood." Hook.

"Really? Anyone who gets *in the mood* to this shit has to be like riddled with STDs and brain tumours." Line.

“Hey man, hey man, that’s not nice.” The boy raises his eyebrows at him. “Don’t talk about your mom like that.” Sinker.

His eyes widen and his face reddens incredibly. If he gets any hotter in the face the tips of his popped collar will catch fire. He clenches his fist around his cup and it crunches loudly, more drink sloshing out over his fist. He stares at Richie incredulously for only a second before Richie loses it, doubling over in laughter. He hears a muttered *you’re so fucking disgusting* and then he’s storming off. Richie can’t stop laughing.

Bev comes over then, she’d probably ignored the whole thing, or most of it at least. He throws an arm over her shoulder, says,

“Beverly, that is without a doubt the most annoying man I’ve ever met,” she tilts her head a bit like *you’re one to talk*, “and I promise you within a month I’m going to fuck him. Or kill him.”

Bev nods sagely. “Those are the only two kinds of relationships yeah.” And Richie chugs the rest of his second allotted beer, then puts it down on the arm of the couch.

“Right you are. Let’s go find some weed.” Luckily his friends are more than happy to follow

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They do find a room with a half assembled circle of people spread out across the bed and floor, a couple making out heavy in the blue beanbag chair. They don’t know any of them but they’re all too stoned to care about that, only that they close the door faster *we’re hot boxing it man*. They spread out, Ben pulls out some of his weed (the only one of them who ever actually buys it instead of bumming off others like a heathen) and they load up the bong that’s passed to them, and Richie’s had a bit to drink already so after two pretty hefty bowls things get blurry. Like the, *he closes the door to the washroom he just used and actually he’s suddenly not sure if it was a washroom or a closet because it didn’t even occur to him to turn on the light* kind of blurry.

They leave before it gets too pathetic to stay any longer, Stan ushering them out because they’ve done the sleeping on strangers



floors things enough times and he knows Bev will want to take her make up off before bed, and Ben will want to put on a movie that he'll pass out exactly seven minutes into.

Richie sees the prep from earlier, still nameless, on the other end of the front lawn with a gaggle of other clean pressed straight edge looking assholes. He can't resist.

"Hey, Maroon Five!" Unbelievably, he looks over. Like who answers to Hey Maroon Five! who is this guy? "Have a good night cutie! Give your mom my love!"

"Sick your mom joke, asshole, call me when you come up with something that's actually funny!" He turns to leave and then seems to think better of it and turns back lightning quick, "Actually no, don't call me, don't ever talk to me again."

Richie smiles. "Not a chance my love!" He waves at him like a bride waving her husband off to war from a train platform. God, truly, there is nothing quite like being a complete nuisance.

He pukes in a bush on a quiet street a block away, and then blacks out fully.

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Richie gets a flyer for the school's rock radio station during the second week of school. It's like destiny — he's leaning against the side of the building having a post class smoke, and when he goes to step on the butt of the cigarette there it is, light yellow paper with grainy graphic block text reading *UCLA Radio! It's all jamz!* which is kind of a fucking stupid headline but also. He'd be so good on the radio.

He goes down to the building marked on the flyer that very day, and he's obviously not the only person trying to intern there, so they put him on the waiting list and tell him they'll let him know when to come back to do an "informal" interview and figure out his schedule. He's so fucking stoked. The room's lined in vinyls and and cassette tapes and CDs and the radio host who was DJing when he was there was playing Bowling For Soup.

In high school he'd soundtrack everything, cheesy little compilations he'd burn from his iTunes library of lime wire downloads onto CDs. A lot of them ended up in his car, tossed around in the glove compartment and he'd pick one out at random for the drive to school, and scream along to Third Eye Blind or Cute Is What We Aim For. Others he'd theme for his friends. He gave Bev one full of No Doubt and Paramore and Hole, even though she obviously knew about those bands, but she told him once that when she was really down on herself that was the playlist she listened to over everything else. Ben's playlist had been hardest to compose (and it did feel like composing) because he got stressed out sometimes, especially when they were younger, by all the heavy stuff Richie and Bev listened to. He did his best to track down every acoustic version to every song he liked and even bit the bullet and downloaded a couple New Kids on the Block songs to put on there and gave it to Ben. And he even burned a collection of bird calls onto a CD for Stan, mostly as a joke, but Stan said it helped him better understand some of his books so. That was equal parts infuriating and gratifying.

On top of that he's funny, and not just morning radio show two gross men and one exasperated woman funny, funny enough to make Stan laugh so hard he shot lemonade out his nose once. Richie's bouncing off the walls leaving the radio station, already compiling playlists in his head (starting with Sugarcult's bouncing off the walls) so he tracks Bev down immediately and finds her half asleep at a picnic bench in the courtyard. There's a half empty blue monster at her elbow, and she has one earphone in. He clicks the centre button on her iPod nano (an incredibly expensive gift from her aunt for getting into university) and pauses Copeland. She'll be a little pissed — and he's right, she cuts him a glare to kill — but he can't be bothered with that right now.

"No, I know, but I'm not actually sorry cause check this shit out!" He thrusts the slightly crumpled and sweaty radio flyer to her. She scans the page but doesn't move to grab it.

"That's cool. Did you apply?"

"Does a bear shit in the woods?"

"Mm."

“Okay please finish your monster so you can become a human and then be excited for me, your best friend, the light of your life, fire of your loins, or whatever it is they talk about in your fucking vampire books.”

“There’s no loins.” But she obliges and chugs the rest of the monster in one go. Sugar rush, yikes. “Did you hear you’re being posted about on MySpace?”

“Ooooooh what is it does someone have a crush on me? Did my nudes leak?”

“As if Trashmouth, it’s some dude you got into a fight with last weekend at that party. The one Ben took us to? I don’t know.”

“Sort of.” Of course he remembers. Definitely he woke up the morning after completely lucid with a picture perfect memory of the previous night. Definitely. “What can I say though, I’m unforgettable. I’m not surprised he’s still talking about me.”

“No, not like right now he posted it last weekend, it only just got to me though. Sarah from my screen printing workshop asked me if I knew you.”

“Amazing. What’d he say?”

“Uh, something about like, stupid hair and like entitled Californians or something? I’m not sure.” She grabs his backpack and pulls out his laptop, “think we can get on the library wifi from out here?”

“Absolutely not, but let’s try.”

They wait the full eight minutes it takes for his shitty laptop to boot up, and then they can’t even get on the library wifi from outside, no matter how close they get to it. Of course.

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Richie hates to admit it, but the second he gets to his dorm he logs into his MySpace and clicks through to the tab he has open with Eddie’s MySpace name typed into the search bar and a 404 error on the screen. He’s got the classic MySpace blue and orange, but his background’s a repeating mirror selfie of him and a brunette with

some truly tragic highlights. It's all pretty basic, and Richie hadn't expected much else from this dude really. No flair.

Richie pauses his profile song immediately, because he hasn't coded it hidden (like Richie has), thank god. His Top 8 is mostly his friends, at number 1 is ~\*MyraTiara\*~ but when he clicks through to her profile all it does is prove that she is in fact the girl tiled nauseatingly across his whole profile and that she lives in Ithaca. Anyone under number one doesn't seem important enough to check, and anyway none of them are really people Richie recognizes. Different circles.

And then of course, Maroon 5 and Owl City, right there, nestled in at 5 and 6. Sucks for the two people under them.

He scrolls through his blog to try and find the what he wrote about Richie. His first blog post is just about the things that pissed him off this week it looks like, which is hilarious. Apparently he hates slow walkers, and the coffee at the Kerckhoff Coffee House (kind of fair), and loud parties in his res hall, and getting his shoes dirty (if they're boat shoes Richie's gonna scream). He's filled out an obnoxiously long survey too, with absolutely no hot or spicy questions, as far as Richie can tell, though he scrolls through it pretty fast.

*1. Last beverage:*

*water*

*2. Last phone call:*

*myra <3*

*3. Last song you listened to:*

*fireflies - owlcity*

*11. Kissed anyone on your friends list:*

*just Myra <3333*

*12. How many kids do you want:*

*three!*

13. Do you want any pets:

*im allergic*

18. What did you do for your last birthday:

*dinner and a movie (The Holiday) with Myra <3 love u baby*

25. What time did you wake up today:

*7:30am ughhhh*

36. Nicknames?

*Eddie's already a nickname it doesn't need to be shorter?!?!?*

66. Relationship status:

*taken and happy!! <33 Myra <33*

70. Height:

*5' 8"*

76. Do you have a crush on someone???

*the one and only ~\*MyraTiara\*~*

Oh, he's like, one of *those* boyfriends. Lame. But after the hundred most boring questions in the world? Jackpot. The blog post about Richie himself. Oh god, suddenly Richie wishes he'd sent it out as a bulletin, but this will do.

*Sunday, September 29, 2007*

*Ugh!!!!*

*It's so fucking stupid to think you're "superior" because of whatever music you listen to especially if it objectively sounds like nails on a chalkboard UGH. Like ooooh okay we get it you're sooooo much cooler than all of us because you grew up in California and grew your shitty emo fringe out and you know so much more than all us "townies" and "preps" whatever loser.*

*Sorry everyone, really needed to vent. Some guys can just be so fucking rude that it ruins the party for you.*

*10:44 AM - 7 Comments - 9 Kudos*

Oh it was so worth the effort. He was so upset he posted about it at 10 in the morning the day after the party. That's crazy. Richie has never been so proud of himself in his life, not even when he finally pulled off a front nose grind at the Culver City skatepark (he is a shitty California boy), and Ethan, one of the older punk boys at his high school, had managed to capture it on his camera phone. He blue-toothed it to Richie's slightly shittier phone and it took forever, and they were sort of tentative friends after that. He's riding this high when he scrolls down to the comments and sees the first, from a BethBetH, that just says *rofl eddie ur so random !!! ahaha I saw that guy at the party 2 what a tool*.

Okay she doesn't even know him what the fuck. And it's not the first time a sentence or less had been written carelessly about him on a wall, physical or virtual, and he thinks maybe he's seen himself on these walls so many times at this point that he should feel at home there, a regular poster presence. Move over Jonas Brothers and Chad Michael Murray. And he thinks even, maybe he's sort of glad in a way that they can commiserate about how much he sucks but actually, he doesn't need to be reading it.

He clicks out of Eddie's blog post to Ethan's page, now that he'd remembered him, and when there's not much interesting there he goes to You Me at Six's page, and then through some other bands but he's still thinking about BethBetH. Whoever the fuck that even is.

Fuck it, he's gonna get so fucking high and listen to high school never ends and maybe then he'll feel better.

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On Tuesday Richie meets Stan for breakfast in the cafeteria. They both have 10 a.m's on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Stan had suggested they have breakfast and walk together to class on those days. It was mutually beneficial, because it forced Richie to show up to class on time in the morning, and forced Stan to have a breakfast instead of having a bite of a granola bar and running out of his dorm straight to class. There would be times in high school when Stan would get so overwhelmed by his school work and extra curriculums that he'd forget to eat for days at a time and Richie would bring him peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to school which Stan would eat even though he hated them. (And when Richie learned that he started trying to cook him stuff he'd like more, with varying success). Now, Richie meets Stan at the entrance and they move through collecting their breakfast components silently, barely awake.

They're both choking through mugs of awful black coffee (not even Richie trusts the caf milk and creamer) sitting at the end of one of the big booth tables. Stan got scrambled eggs and half a piece of toast with butter and Richie had gotten a bowl of lucky charms (he picked up two of those little boxes of lucky charms and picked out just the marshmallows from the second and added them to the first). Stan eyes it warily while he's eating his eggs.

"You know that's just going to make you more tired. There's no nutritional value."

"Eat my dick and balls for some nutritional value Stanley."

"Beep beep Richie." He bites a corner of his toast off violently. Richie slurps loudly at his spoon of marshmallows. If him and Stan got married he thinks this is what their breakfasts would always be like, except he'd be wearing a long silk robe and Stan would be reading the news (in print, because his blackberry — or whatever they have in 15 years — hurts his eyes) and they'd just bitch at each other for a half hour before they went to work. Or Stan went to work and Richie bummed around the house like a housewife.

“How’d that forty page reading go Stanny?”

“It’s like. What the fuck is accounting and why am I majoring in it. That’s how it went.” Richie lays his hand on Stan’s gently where it’s resting next to his coffee cup. Stan looks at him long sufferinglly.

“That’s because you make shitty life choices.” He turns his hand around under Richie’s and pinches the skin between his thumb and forefinger.

“Thanks shit head.” And then his scowl’s smoothing out and he throws a friendly little smile and wave somewhere over Richie’s shoulder. That’s specifically his *trying to make a new friend* face, because all his existing friends know he’s a bitch in the mornings. “Morning Eddie.”

“Hey Stan.” Eddie the prep comes to stand beside their table with a mug of coffee in his hand, backpack thrown haphazardly over one shoulder. Oh fuck yes. Richie leans back in the booth and rests his arm across the back of the seat as an invitation to Eddie, who notices and decidedly does not sit in the space Richie just moved out of. He does scowl at his bowl of cereal though.

“Are you seriously having lucky charms for breakfast?”

Richie looks at Eddie's mug of coffee, the only thing he has, and reaches hurriedly for his bowl.

“Shit sorry, how rude,” he has one last spoonful, making sure to really lick off the spoon, and holds the bowl out to Eddie. “Do you want the rest?” Eddie’s face sours and Richie smiles for the first time since he woke up this morning. Stan kicks at him under the table.

“Where are you headed Eddie?” Stan still looks more than pleasant. Bastard. It’s unfair that only Richie ever has to deal with his rude morning personality. Eddie gulps down what looks like half of his mug of coffee and looks down at the G-Shock strapped to his wrist.

“I’ve got a 10 a.m. in Cornell Hall.” Stan also looks at his own watch and finishes off his coffee, nodding at Richie in that *let’s head out* way.



“We’ve both got class in that direction, we’ll walk with you.” Eddie hesitates, not at all trying to disguise the fact that he’s apprehensive about Richie’s presence, but nods anyway. He turns around to lead them out of the caf and Stan throws Richie a *be nice* look as they’re sliding out of the booth. Richie does a complicated cross my heart hand motion, including some waving a white flag motions and circling his finger above his head to signal a halo, which he cuts out when Eddie turns around to ask Stan a question about the class Richie assumes they have together. He throws a calculating little look at Richie too but ignores him mostly. That’s fine.

Richie lags behind a little bit because he gets a little distracted trying to perfectly stack his coffee mug on top of another in the dirty dish buckets and when he runs to catch up with them he takes a little once over of Eddie’s outfit. One of his backpack straps is longer than the other and it’s noticeable, and the back of his hair is sleep messy, but his white socks are pulled up and pristine under his boat shoes.

### Notes for the Chapter:

i listen to a 30+ hour playlist i made of all the emo shit i listened to when i was like 11 while i write this and that emotional journey is what its based off mostly. also ive had a waybackmachine tab open with the myspace homepage from like september 2007 open for the last few weeks. idk im just combining all the references i can remember from like 2005-2009 and calling it 2006 and pretending that works? don't fact check anything almost none of this is like chronologically accurate and i dont care.

also HOLLERTILLYOUPASSOUT was gonna be brokencyde but i would've had to write someone punching richie in the face and i didn't wanna do that. but now u know where my head was at.

let me know about typos pls and also what u thought  
i love u kthxbi

## 2. there's a class for this

On Wednesday, hanging his left arm out the window of his dorm to try and sneak a late night smoke, Richie gets a call from the Radio station, to see if he could come for that informal, super chill don't worry about it, interview on Saturday morning. And he absolutely could. For sure, for sure, no doubt. Saturday 9 a.m, bright and early. Richie Tozier is a famed morning person.

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Sometimes, Richie has these dreams that he doesn't know what to make of. And it's not as if his unconscious brain isn't a monster from time to time, throwing all sorts of unpleasanties at him in the night. He's had dreams where he's trying to eat a cup of red jello through his hundreds of rows of shark teeth, and all the kids are making fun of him because he can't eat the jello, in spite of or because of his teeth. And he's had dreams where his teeth keep chipping off but he can't stop talking and the shards of his teeth catch on his lips and tongue and he's bleeding all over himself but he keeps on talking — a waking and dreaming Trashmouth. Bev's aunt said his teeth specific dreams were typical dreams to have when you're anxious about stuff. He'd had those show up naked to class dreams once or twice (some with happy endings, some with not so much) and dreams where he's a mermaid with just a shell bra and he's at the same time her fish best friend and the fork she uses as a mirror and then the ocean itself, his thoughts and body expanding to fill the craters the real ocean left behind when dream Richie had taken its place.

But then there's these— Sometimes he has these dreams where everything's just a bit to the left. Those you can't really remember in the morning but you're not sure if you really woke up, if everything's in the same place it's always been or if at some point in the night you shifted to match the slightly to the left-ness of the dream and you've slipped a bit out of your place, so you're also slightly to the left. Just slightly out of your own reality. Sometimes he'll spend two hours in the morning shifting all his furniture a couple inches to the right or left to see if any of it feels right, re-pasting the posters to the walls. It still leaves him feeling out of sorts and unbalanced the whole day.

He has one of these dreams the night before his interview at the radio station. He was obviously anxious about it (regardless of how many times they assured him it was a chill thing) so he'd been expecting some teeth related stuff, spent a full four minutes brushing them, getting himself extra acquainted to give his brain some proper material to work with. If teeth was what he was gonna get he was gonna be prepared for it.

He wakes up slightly to the left.

All he remembers is driving home, and feeling both like it was the only place to be and the last place he ever wanted to be, but home wasn't the home he grew up in, and he wasn't the him he grew up as. Or maybe he was the him he was going to be. The second he pushes at it he forgets all of it, and when he looks at his alarm clock he's already ten minutes behind schedule

He gets out of bed, pulls it out two inches away from the wall to line up with how he woke up, and then gets dressed like he always does.

On his way out he grabs his skateboard, because it'll look cool probably to show up on a skateboard. Maybe there'll be like a cool chick with lip piercings and teased up hair and she'll see him, in his short dickies and striped long sleeve under a short sleeve Yellowcard shirt combo and fall in love with him. Or want to fuck him at the very least. And the DJ will think he's so cool and chill that within the first week he's inviting him into the booth to ask his opinion on what to play next, Sum41 or a Nirvana throwback, and Richie will recommend some of the local bands he's seen at underground punk shows, and the DJ will be impressed with this knowledge. And it'll always be the right answer too, the perfect song to meld into the end of the previous one. And then within a month he'll have his own show where he gets to talk shit, get hit and play hits and it'll all be so fucking sick.

What actually happens when he gets there is this: a girl with a zillion tiny braids pulled up in a big bun on the top of her head tells him, first and foremost, to leave his board outside and ushers him in before he's even had a second to really process that, so he ends up having to chuck it out the closing door behind him. It's survived worse. She's moving through the shelves of CDs with a practiced ease

and the speed of someone who hasn't slept a full night in 4 years and is surviving on purely red bull, coffee and adrenaline.

She's saying to Richie, "Ok so, like I know this is technically an interview but the station head isn't actually here yet and we can't get a hold of him so like I'm just gonna put you to work cause I have an article review due in two hours and I've barely started it because ever since the last intern flaked this shit takes up literally all of my time. It's not hard, you just need to go through this rack of CDs here," She points to a rolling cart of poorly stacked CDs, god, hundreds of them. Thousands. "Ricky was doing something with them last night, I'm not asking any questions and I promise like, you don't want to either. They're all gonna be in the wrong cases so just organize that and shelve them, it's all in alphabetical and genre order. If you have any questions I'm in the office over there," she points to the little loft above them where there are two doors, one with blinds pulled down over the windows and the other a DJ booth, "but please, please don't actually I have so much to do. And also, don't fuck up. But you won't cause this is just like." She waves a hand vaguely and then he's alone with the worst case of whiplash recorded, and the millions of CDs.

He looks up to the almost second floor where she went like maybe this was just a test to see if he scared easy and she'll come back down and actually explain what the fuck is going on. He spends a couple seconds watching the closed door of the office, and then the current DJ in the booth, a girl with a spiky pink pixie cut, who's very animatedly saying something into the microphone. Richie can't imagine what morning news is that exciting.

He feels time starting to slip away from him in the silence of the room so he turns to the CDs and gets to reorganizing them because like. What else is he gonna do.

His mother always said cleaning the house was meditative, that she always felt better after doing it. Richie figured it was just her trying to convince him to clean his room for once. He thinks he gets it now though, because the mechanical repetitive motion of this is sort of soothing, especially after the slightly to the left-ness of the morning, it's nice to reattach to his body.

He lets time slip away from him this time.

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Eventually he runs out of CDs to stack, and he's considering going upstairs to tell the girl that he's done, see if there's anything else she needs from him, but he doesn't want to bother her, hasn't actually ever seen anyone that stressed. The time on the big clock above the door says he's been here for over an hour. He can kill a half hour no problem.

There's a broom in the corner of the room knocked over onto its side, and he figures he might as well continue channelling his mother and meditatively sweep the floors. Keep himself moving. When he's truly out of productive things to do he rides the now empty rolly cart down the isles and looks through the CDs they have. There's a lot he knows, more he doesn't. Paper and laminate wrapped CDs with four songs on them from local bands, cassettes with sharpie on the front that Richie's pretty sure he's been offered on the street for 5 bucks. There's a carefully curated section of vinyls in the back of the room, protected from the sun coming in through the front windows and the light from the fluorescents above. He spots some ABBA, Toto IV (which his parents have and he used to steal it to listen to Africa so much he wore down the vinyl just through that track). It looks like they have a full Iron Maiden collection, marked as it's own genre. The wall behind the cases is lined with what Richie assumes are the most rare, first editions of Queen albums and vinyl in shapes and colours. From the top of the stairs he hears a,

"Hey dude, you done?"

He's suddenly aware of his foot resting on the rolling cart, in an obvious *I've been riding this unstable thing around in a small space stacked with breakable things, and I intend to hop back on in a second* gesture. He feels like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

"Yeah, I uh... I'm done."

The girl comes hopping down the stairs, throwing a confused look at the floor (where there are no longer receipts and coffee stained napkins stuck in the bottom edges of the shelves) and then back at Richie.

"Don't touch those vinyls." He tears his arms away from the shelves

of vinyls he was definitely just touching. “Also, sick, you’re hired.” He wants to ask if her she’s majoring in giving people conversational whiplash.

“For real?” She nods.

“Yeah dude. Thanks for helping out.” He shrugs. It really ended up being fine. He thinks. She waves him over to the wall by the front door and points at a couple sheets on the bulletin board.

“This is the schedule, you’ll be taking all the shifts written in for Mick, if you can. If not you can talk to Jazz and see if you can like shuffle some shifts around with her. I don’t know.”

It’s only by some kind of divine intervention and his lazy class selection at the beginning of term that the schedule works for him. It’s a six hour shift three times a week, Saturday from 1 to 7, Sunday nights from 6 to midnight and Wednesday afternoons again. Thank god he doesn’t have class on Mondays or Wednesdays. And everyone told him that was a weird schedule at the beginning of the semester. Jokes on them, huh.

“No, I can totally do this.” She nods at him.

“Cool man. Don’t come in super late, drunk, or high please?”

“I’ll try not to drink at noon on a Wednesday but honestly, depends on how my Tuesday goes.” The girl cracks a little smile at him and pats at his arm placatingly.

“Yeah, Tuesday’s are rough I hear ya. You don’t have to do the shift today, but I’ll see you tomorrow.” She heads then, one foot out one foot in she sticks her head back behind the door and says, “Oh, I’m Mari by the way, nice to meet you dude.” And then she’s gone.

Richie says, “Nice to meet you too,” to no one and gives Mari a 30 second head start to avoid any awkwardness before he heads out too.

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Richie’s skateboarding back from his weekly Wednesday late night 7-Eleven run (the further one with the parking lot, so he could show off to no one with some kick flips) carrying his loot of beef chimichangas

and a blue raspberry, wild cherry and mountain dew slurpee when he gets into a collision.

It goes like this: he's cutting across through the smaller pathways between the residence halls, and there's a room on the second floor with the light on so he can see inside perfectly where there's two people arguing and through the half open window he hears her saying *i like- i can't fucking believe this* and he says *babe it was an accident* and she says *you shit in my fucking bed!* and he's in the middle of saying *i was drunk!* when slurpee, chimichangas and Richie are all being propelled from his skateboard at superhuman speeds.

"Are you fuck- Oh seriously, are you fucking kidding me?"

He knows the voice. Eddie the Prep, Stan's class mate (friend?), boat shoe wearer. The most annoying person Richie's ever met.

From where he landed, Richie can see Eddie, across the pathway from him, sprawled half on the pavement and half in the grass running alongside it. Richie pulls himself up to sitting and avoids Eddie's glare from where he too is now leaning up, to inspect the scrapes he can feel starting to bleed along his right elbow and knee. Nothing feels too fucked up. His head is maybe a little more shaken up than usual.

He looks at the mess his slurpee made of the pavement, then at his board (which fucked off and hit a tree thirty feet away), his chimichanga lying just out of the slurpee mess (still miraculously in the bag), and finally back at Eddie's very red face, and very wet shirt and pants.

He says, "It kinda looks like you pissed yourself," at the same time that Eddie says,

"Seriously do you not fucking watch where you're going?" And Richie's head is maybe a little bit more scrambled than he thought because all he can say is,

"He shit the bed."

Eddie blanches, looking at Richie the way moms look at their rowdy

8 year old sons when they tell her to shut up in the grocery store, and you know she's about to fucking murder him. Richie's been on the receiving end of a few of those in his life.

"What... are you just fucking brain dead or something?"

Richie waves a hand uselessly up at the window, where the couple who was just arguing are making out heavily. Is there time to wonder if the shit is still in the bed, or if they cleaned it up and are continuing where they left off? How long ago was there shit in the bed?

Eddie starts getting up, brushing himself down absentmindedly, clumps of dirt and grass detach from his shorts and land around his feet on the pavement.

"I cannot fucking believe this, really, you're completely fucking insufferable. First, you skateboard, which is annoying enough on its own," he starts counting off on his fingers, "you don't even fucking watch where you're going when you do, you run into someone, knock them over and all you have to say is 'he shit the bed'? What does that even fucking mean?" And then he finally looks down at himself and remembers the state of his shirt and pants he says, "And oh, you made me spill my red bull all over myself. Thank you."

Richie collects his chimichanga and empty slurpee cup on his way up. "There was a couple fighting about him shitting in the bed like, don't pretend you wouldn't be distracted too, if you heard that."

Eddie still looks like he couldn't care less and also like he's about ten seconds away from ripping Richie's head off.

Richie shrugs, "Look man you could've gotten out of my way too so, equal blame here I think. Like, sure you're pants are a little wet but I lost my hard earned slurpee, so call it even? Whaddya say?" He sticks his hand out to him, which he's just noticing is also ripped up and there's gravel stuck in all the shallow bloody scrapes. Eddie looks at it and when he grabs it he squeezes tight, until his knuckles are white and Richie's wincing in pain that he's not even exaggerating. Much.

"No it definitely is fuckin not equal blame. If you're on a thing with



wheels you're the one with the responsibility not to fucking kill people? Also! I did try to get out of your way and you still managed to run into me, because God is punishing me for something." He mumbles the last bit to himself.

There are a couple seconds while he's talking where Richie genuinely thinks his hand might break in Eddie's grip, but Eddie lets go before he has to admit anything to him. He thinks he could read it on his face anyway — has always felt like he's far too easy to read. He makes a big show of cradling his hand to his chest once it's been returned to him, checking to see if anything's broken and wincing in pain a lot. Eddie's not even in the least bit amused, but he's not getting any angrier either and that takes a lot of the joy out of this whole experience. Richie throws his hands up in a *so what now* gesture and lets them drop to his sides.

A long silence follows where they just stare at each other, Richie's shifty in all the ways Eddie doesn't seem to be, and he's getting increasingly more intimidated by the way Eddie sets his jaw. Unlike Richie his face gives nothing away, and he's not sure if he's about to get the shit kicked out of him by some 5'6 wanna be frat bro in a polo or get the cops called on him (he's also got pretty strong soccer mom energy, Richie wouldn't put that past him). Neither of those things happen. Eddie simply sticks his hand out to Richie palm side up. For a crazy moment Richie thinks he wants him to hold it.

"Give me your laundry card, this load's on you."

Fuck. The joke potential in that sentence is so overwhelming that he can't actually vocalize any of them.

"Absolutely fucking not. Honestly Edward, you should be thanking me! Sure, it looks like you pissed yourself but if that stains you'll never have to wear this outfit again! I've given you a gift here, really."

Eddie narrows his eyes and swiftly kicks him in the shin.

While Richie's bent over clutching his leg and groaning in pain he feels Eddie duck around him and pull his chain wallet out of his pocket. Fuck, his mom had been right, the pockets on these shorts

were way too baggy and easy to pickpocket. He swings around to get at him, a little unbalanced from standing up too quick, and he stumbles when Eddie tugs on the chain that's still connected to his belt loop. His shorts almost fall off. His mom was also right about the inefficiency of his lopsided studded belt too.

"Hey watch it I'm attached to that!"

Eddie only pulls again at the chain in response and his shorts slip another couple inches down, tangling awkwardly around his legs. Richie grabs at his waistband with one hand and reaches the other out to Eddie, a chains length away from him, to no avail.

"Are you really fucking robbing me ri—" But Eddie's already holding his laundry card in his hand and throwing the wallet squarely back at Richie's chest.

"I'll give it back to Stan in class. Hope I never have to see you again, bye."

"Never? But I'll miss you oh so dearly!" He gathers up his wallet by the chain and shoves it back into his pocket. "Also fuck you!"

Eddie throws a middle finger over his shoulder as he's walking away.

Fuck. Richie's running out of time to make good on the promise he made to Bev at the party he first met Eddie at but. He really wants to make good on some parts of that promise — he's not sure yet which.

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Richie meets a very confused Stan for breakfast. He hands him his laundry card and says, "Why did Eddie have this?"

And Richie pockets it and says, "I ran into him on my skateboard and then he robbed me."

And Stan says, "Eddie robbed you?"

Richie shrugs at him like *what can you do?* and Stan sighs in that very Stan way of his that says *it is the fucking morning and I'm not dealing with anything yet*. They have a characteristically silent breakfast. Richie doesn't even make any dick jokes for once.

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On Saturday Richie goes for his third shift at the radio station. He's working with Mari again, who's looking far less stressed than when he'd seen her on Saturday and Sunday. She comes in with coffees for everyone at the studio and a red bull for him (he owes her \$2), and a copy of the receipt from the cafe, so he can bring the coffees next time. He looks at the total and feels it like a punch to the gut.

"Oh don't worry you're not paying for it, there's a coffee fund jar in the office. There's like, a little sticky note next to it where we just like write what we want and drop some change for it." He can feel the relief in his fucking toes. There's so many shots of espresso and flavoured syrups in the coffee for Ricky — the station head — that the total's over \$20 for three coffees.

She doesn't go up to the office this time because she's done all the scheduling for the next week, and also, mostly, because Ricky's up there doing whatever it is he does with all these CDs. Richie and Mari organize some more of Ricky's previously discarded CDs and Richie runs a couple up to the DJ currently working when he asks (and Richie truly, truly, does not know this guy's name) and then when they're out of things to mindlessly clean and reorganize they try to ride around on the little roly cart at the same time for a while. It's fun, and when the pink spiky haired DJ from his first Saturday comes in to pick something up Mari goes all blushy and stuttery. That's new, fun and interesting.

On her way out a couple hours before Richie, Mari tells him about a party her and her roommates are throwing in their apartment off campus.

"You can come if you want."

"Yeah for sure, but I've got a codependency issue, is it okay if my friends come? It's only three of them."

She smiles and the little gold star plated on her canine tooth glints in the fluorescents. "Fucking yeah you can and should. Hope they're cuter than you." He throws up the finger at her but she's already basically out the door. He's never met a person who moves faster than her, and he's himself, y'know?

He texts all his friends variations on *party tnite xP pree my dorm @ 9* to Stan, Bev and Ben.

Bev sends *get me a 4 LOKO I'm going craycray toniteeeeeeeee*, Ben says *snax on me !!* and Stan asks if he can bring a friend from class.

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After work Richie picks up a twelve pack of PBR and a watermelon Four Loko for Bev from the only store that will accept his fake. It's a twenty minute walk from campus, and totally worth it, if only because he doesn't have to listen to Bev and Stan bitch at him for leeching off of them for their hard earned alcohol and Ben's hard earned weed.

At his dorm — which is a single only because there's about 4 square feet at the front of the room that got pushed in to make room for a janitor's closet in the hall — he only has time to throw the ever growing pile of clothing collecting at the foot of his bed and on his computer chair haphazardly into his closet, and swipe a couple snack wrappers into the garbage under his desk. He's opening the window to let out some of the weed and axe body spray scent that had nearly taken a physical shape in his room when Bev, Stan and the un-named classmate he brought stream into Richie's room without knocking, already mid conversation. Richie moves to sit in his computer chair so he can spin in circles and smile up at his friends talking around him. When he catches on to what's happening he'll insert himself into the conversation, with hopefully the dirtiest and easiest joke possible.

The friend Stan brought with him is a tall pretty girl with a shock of tightly curled dark brown hair around her head, a little white headband struggles against it to keep it all off her face. Richie zeroes in on the way Stan blushes up at her. Despite the upperclassman party they're going to she doesn't seem like she's trying hard to impress anyone, baggy grey zip up thrown over a denim skirt and a t-shirt with a big yellow and green flower on the front. It's an almost childish outfit actually. She's even wearing Uggs with it and Richie's doing everything in his power to pretend they're not there.

Bev throws herself onto Richie's bed, sticking both arms out to him, making grabby hands.

“Four Loko?”

“Jesus, what Bev, not even a full sentence?” But he spins out of the chair and right into the fridge, chucks the watermelon flavoured demonic entity at Bev, says, “Hope you vomit that later tonight.”

“Four Loko tastes better coming up than anything else does.” And she’s got it up to her mouth, taking long chugs before she’s even finished the last syllable.

Richie grabs a beer from the pack for himself, Stan and Stan’s friend — he still doesn’t know her name.

Stan accepts the offered beer, and so does the girl, who offers a *oh, thanks* in return, and then Stan realizes he’s just brought a complete stranger into Richie’s room and not even said hi to him, let alone told him who exactly was in his space.

“Oh, Patty this is my friend Richie.” He gestures back and forth between them like *please do the rest of this yourselves*. Stan’s always hated introducing people.

Patty taps the can against Richie’s and opens it at the same time one handed, with a little nod.

“Well hey, thanks for the beer,” and that’s honestly a way smoother introduction than Richie has ever managed. He smiles back at her, and throws an arm around Stan’s shoulders.

“So tell me Patty,” He takes a long pull from his beer, “How’d you meet our boy Stanny?” He says, because he likes when he almost rhymes his sentences.

“We have introduction to macroeconomics together.”

“Hmm.” He strokes at his chin. If life always went the way he wanted it to there’d be a gold monocle balanced across his nose with a delicate stemmed glass of wine in one hand and a crystal topped walking cane in the other. In a voice matching this version of himself he says, “What the, pray tell, fuck is a macroeconomic?”

Of course he zones out while they explain, because he’s not actually

interested in economics and refuses to think about numbers for a fucking second. He's really more interested in why Stan's let him lean on him for so long. The closest he can get to a reason is that he doesn't want to look like a bitch in front of Patty, which is fair, because she looks sweet, but it can't be healthy to be hiding such an integral part of himself from the woman of his dreams. And she must be, because Stan's never even mentioned a girl to him, let alone brought her to a party with them.

When they've finished explaining it Richie says, "Good good, very good. I didn't understand any of the words you said, but I'm glad you said them."

Because he lives the furthest away Ben shows up last, pushing his way into the room with a polite knock on the doorframe.

Bev smiles around a, "Ben! How are you my dear?" and waves from her place on Richie's bed, where she'd been happily sipping her Four Loko and watching Richie meet Patty.

He hums an almost response around the bag of chips that he's holding in his teeth so he can close the door gently behind him. He's wearing his letterman jacket and a pair of light wash jeans. Richie says,

"Ooooooh how's jock life treating you mister letterman?" And does a complicated dance with his eyebrows. Ben lets out his big *HA* laugh, the kind of laugh that you can't contain, the kind that you're embarrassed by if you're not around the people who know how you sound in all your laughs. He grabs the bag seamlessly with his newly freed hand as it falls from his mouth. Incredible.

"I get up at five every morning to get all my workouts done, I have three hours of practice a day and then classes and homework. I like, barely have time to do my hair."

"Are you saying the movies lied to me?" Richie grabs a beer from the twelve pack and goes to trade it for some of the snacks Ben's holding. "Is the life of a college athlete not all booze and babes?"

“Sorry to break it to you.” Ben settles in against the wall at the bottom of the bed, like a reasonable person, and Richie throws himself down across him and Bev, hand coming to rest delicately over his forehead.

“Oh how ever will I survive this deception! Mr. Handsome— I mean Hanscome, I fear you may need to... Revive me.” And makes a big deal of gasping and then holding his breath, lips conspicuously puckered.

Ben grabs Richie’s jaw loosely with his free hand, and then he leans over him real slow and Richie’s thinking about how his breath must smell after all the coffee and cigarettes and now beer he had today and also what the fuck is happening — and then Ben’s shoving two sour cream and onion Pringles right into his mouth where he’d had it gaping open in confusion.

He crunches a *fuckin delish, thanks* around them as he chews.

Ben is introduced to Patty over where Richie’s still lying on his lap, chewing on some chips Bev’s throwing into his mouth.

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At 11 they’re at the party. It’s fully jumpin’ and Richie can’t find Mari anywhere. Patty had run into some people she knew and Stan has been following her around all moony eyed all night, so he’s there too. Bev’s in the kitchen trying to steal someone’s poorly protected bottle of booze when they’re not looking — because the one Four Loko hadn’t been enough apparently — while Ben blocks her from view with his football star shoulders.

At 11:30 Richie finally finds Mari, though he’s lost the rest of his friends. She’s wearing dark green cargo pants and a BUCK FUSH tee that stops just before the waistband. She yells *Richie!* almost right in his face, taps her cup of jungle juice against his and drags him out to the makeshift dance floor they made of her living room. They’re playing Sk8r Boi. That’s fine, Richie can jump around to some Avril Lavigne.

“Did you know she only learned how to skateboard for the image?” Mari yells into his ear. “She’s a total fraud.”

He didn't know that.

At 12:30 Ben finds Richie on the balcony smoking with Mari and her roommates. Instead of talking, they all scream over each other,

"We're all fire signs so we have to yell," says Mari.

Her roommate who's name Richie knew at the beginning of the night but now only knows starts with an S says, "Fuck you bitch I'm only yelling cause you don't listen to anything but your own voice," and the third one cackles loudly saying, "Stop both of you I'm trying to hit a fucking bowl," and it devolves into more yelling of *that sounds like a personal problem and you could just stop laughing bitch we're not even being funny.*

They're too invested in their argument to notice Ben when he looks at Richie through them and says, "Bev's had too much to drink." Oh, boy.

Richie motions to Mari that he's gotta go inside and she waves at him with the hand holding her cup of jungle juice and spills it. The door closes on all of them screaming in laughter about it.

Richie's had a lot to drink and smoke tonight, he realizes. He'd felt fine standing out in the night air, leaning against the balcony railing, but in here, walking through the crowded apartment, he feels his head detaching completely from his body. Every person he passes feels like a copy and paste of the last person he passed and Ben somehow is managing to move through the crowd while Richie's just tripping over his own two feet in the same place.

Towards the washroom the apartment narrows into a hallway but the crowd doesn't thin out. Richie tries to pass through it as considerately as he possibly can when his head is floating above his spine and his feet are attached backwards, but there's another person trying to do the same thing in the opposite direction, and as they pass each other their foot catches on either or both of Richie's and everything is suddenly so so fast for a brief moment. Some of his beer spills on someone's bright blue shirt.

"Ah shit, sorry I didn't— It's so fucking crowded and I don't have legs



—” And then it’s Eddie turning around. His collar is popped, his eyes blazing. “Ah, Edward. We have to stop running into each other like this.”

Someone says *excuse me* behind Richie and he’s jostled forward into Eddie’s space, the hallway dilates and shrinks around him with the motion. Eddie keeps his hands up between their chests and he’s pushing Richie away as soon as he can.

“What is this, are you intentionally seeking me out just to spill shit on me?”

“Okay give me some credit. If this was on purpose you’d be... soaked.” It’s almost the joke he wants to make.

“You’re the worst person I’ve ever met.”

Richie tilts his head with a little smile, “That’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me.”

“I’m sure it’s the nicest thing anyone will ever say to you.”

Richie snorts and then sighs, reaches out to flick — not gently — at the popped collar of Eddie’s shirt. It wobbles ridiculously at his jaw. He opens his mouth to retort when he hears *Richie!* from down the hall and oh, right, Bev, vomit. He points a thumb over his shoulder to where Ben called him from.

“There’s nothing I want more than to stay here with you Eddie dear but fate tears us apart yet again.” He blows him a little kiss. “Until we see each other again.”

“Die.”

Richie lets Ben pull him away through the crowd and toward the washroom.

Bev, cradling the toilet, says, “It does not. Fucking taste. Like watermelon. Anymore.”

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He spends most of Sunday morning nursing Bev’s hangover. At 7am

she'd jolted up from his bed where they'd passed out top n tail, and sprinted out to the washrooms to vomit. Richie, a surprisingly light sleeper even after a night of drinking — also a great friend — got out an Advil and a glass of water for her while she was gone. He even opened his spare toothbrush for her. Who needs a spare toothbrush anyway, like what's he gonna do, replace the one he uses now?

Bev comes back and looks near tears accepting the pills and water. She brushes her teeth for ten minutes in the sink and stumbles half asleep back over to the bed — she's fully asleep before she's even lied down, head landing on Richie's chest with a painful thud.

They're gonna overheat and bitch at each other for it in three hours when they're both up again, but Richie rubs her back in soothing little circles until he falls back asleep.

When he wakes up again Bev's gone, but there's a ripped out page from her sketchbook on his nightstand. There's a crudely drawn version of himself on it, huge mouth and bushy eyebrows, his hair a swirling mess. Drawing Richie's drooling all over the pillow. He has to put on his glasses to read that she wrote *thx for takin care of me. luv u stinky sweaty boy p.s u snore loud* under it in the tiniest writing. He pins it up to his wall under the crooked photo of Ben and Stan balancing on Ben's little green BMX.

It's only two, which means he has four hours until work. He sits down to start an analysis due at the end of the week for his script writing class. By 5:30 he's written a solid thirty seven words. The smog shapes he can see hovering over the sprawl of Los Angeles through his window have left imprints on the insides of his eyelids.

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This is their last shift working together so they take it easy, neither of them able to handle loud sounds or sudden movements after the amount of substance abuse the night before. There is no rolling around on the cart. It's a huge fucking bummer.

There is however a lot of sneaking off to sit in the darkest furthest corner of the studio and hide their heads in their knees while the other stands out front and does fuck all unless asked to do something. They switch between these two positions for the first three hours

until Ricky comes down to assign them the incredible and easy task of rewinding a bunch of cassettes he was using to record or something and somehow, pulled the tape out of. Jesus Christ. At least they can sit on the floor and do this. Hours pass and when they stand up they're lightheaded and have to take a break to drink some water before they start re-stacking these.

Mari tosses their painstakingly rewound cassette tapes into the makeshift basket Richie made out of his big hangover t-shirt by lifting the hem of it up and letting the cassettes collect in the fold of the fabric. She's telling him about all of the drama that happened at her party last night, not limited to but including someone vomiting over the balcony railing and their friend screaming at her shitty boyfriend through the front window of their apartment until the cops got called and they had to break up the party. Suddenly Richie remembers,

"Oh hey do you know an Eddie? Short? Wears a lot of polos?" She throws him a look like that says *there's ten thousand people on this campus*. "He was at your party."

"Oh, yeah, kind of curly brown hair?"

Richie nods.

"Yeah he's my roommate's boyfriend's friend. Why?"

"Oh nothing I just like... keep running into him." Which is a grave understatement for their interactions. "Was wondering what his deal was."

Mari slows down with her careful cassette tape balancing act as his shirt pouch fills up. The tapes shift and click clack against each other with each breath Richie takes and they both tense up each time, ready for the mountain to fall.

"What do you mean? Like if he's single or something?"

"No! No just like, why he's so angry all the time."

"Is he?"

“Literally every time I’ve talked to h— Wait, is he not usually?”

Mari shrugs. “I only see him at parties but he seems nice? A couple weekends ago my roommate fell in her heels and busted up her knee real bad and he patched it up like instantly. I still don’t even now like where he found the bandaids and stuff.”

Richie doesn’t really know what to do with that information. He’s been told that that’s the kind of effect he has on people, he guesses. He lets the topic drop and they lapse back into silence.

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Breakfast used to be the most uncomfortable moment of Richie’s day, when he lived at home. He’d dreaded waking up to the smell of bacon (almost literally) every morning — and he knows it sounds stupid too but. Like sometimes his nightmares smell of coffee and bacon.

His parents were the kind of people who needed to have coffee to be able to talk other people, including each other, including Richie. He of course wasn’t allowed to drink coffee, so he was always tired and stressed from waking up to them screaming from the bottom of the stairs that he had to wake up. He’s not hard to wake up, if only they’d ever come up the stairs to his attic bedroom to figure that out. To be fair, it’s a lot of stairs.

His mom too was always tired from late shifts at the restaurant, and no matter how much she said she always wanted him to eat the kind of food she cooked at work, she just wasn’t awake enough to do it, so he had a lot of eggs and bacon. Toast was always his job and he’d put it in the toaster before going to the washroom and by the time he got back the toast would be crispy burnt.

Ever since Stan and him started doing breakfast together two days a week he finds he actually kind of looks forward to it.

On Thursday when he gets to the caf Stan isn’t waiting for him where he usually is. And that’s fine, he’s allowed to be late sometimes — although it is strange. Richie leans against the wall next to the entrance playing snake on his phone and glancing nervously up at every person who passes by thinking they could be Stan, and then his

snake will die because he keeps losing concentration. He dies for the 37th time when the clock on his phone reads 9:40 — later than they ever meet up for breakfast, and Richie wants coffee before class. When he goes inside without Stan it feels like he's committing a cardinal sin.

He grabs a bagel and a little packet of cream cheese, coffee mug filled to the brim so that some spills over with every step he makes. He spots them when he's taking a tentative sip out of the mug to try and preserve as much of it as he can before he gets to a table. Stan and Eddie, at the booth Richie and Stan usually sit at. And they're talking.

Stan, talking, in the morning. Like holding what looks like a sustained conversation. God he's even fucking smiling. It feels like seeing a dog walk on its hind legs. While smoking a cigar. Richie's stomach boils.

He shoves into the booth next to Stan, cuts into their conversation with a, "Would ya look at this, my two best friends in the whole world. So glad you guys are getting along!"

Stan throws him a worried look, and Eddie moves his coffee further away from Richie when he reaches a bit too disjointedly for his bagel. He forgot a butter knife.

"Hey Rich—"

"Eds, I've been telling him for weeks that he should invite you to breakfast, that we should make this a weekly thing right? I am just," he tears at the cream cheese packet a little too enthusiastically and gets some on his fingers, "so fucking happy that he finally listened to me y'know? Always a pleasure to see your beautiful faces in the morning."

"Don't call me Eds, we're not friends."

So they're not friends. Richie knows that for sure. And yet Eddie has the audacity to sit at Richie's breakfast table in the morning, try to steal his childhood friend away from him, and still be a bitch to him? At least have the courtesy to be subtle about your intentions.

And really, who is he, Mr. Polo and perfectly smoothed hair, to take Richie's place at the table? He built this table with his bare hands! Well, no he didn't, obviously, but here the table represents his friendship with Stan, and he did build that with his bare hands. Instead of any of this what he says is,

"Does that mean I can call you Eds when we are friends?"

Eddie scoffs. "As if that would ever happen."

"Gosh golly sir, don't break my heart so! Why, I surely did think this relationship was going somewhere beautiful." He's doing his Southern Belle voice, high in twang, high in pitch, low in caliber. Anyone could do a Southern Belle. At the same time it's the only one that ever got a cackle out of Stan, although he was also high then, so.

"A relationship this," he points between himself and Richie, "is not. Actually I think it's called harassment."

"I— Stan can you believe this? I'm being accused of a crime." Stan looks at him like *what the fuck are you doing?* Oh it's like that then. He looks back to Eddie. "It can't be harassment Eds, this is pure fate. It seems the Big Man," he points up at the ceiling, "wants us to be friends, I'm only following his wishes."

"Unfortunate. I'm an atheist."

Richie grins, "Believe or don't believe what you want to there are unexplainable machinations of the universe that are pushing us together and I for one don't think we should fight it."

"Do you have an off button?"

"Oh I have an on bu—"

"Children. Please, behave. It's the morning." Stan's impression of Richie's dad is impeccable.

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October starts with a yellow washed out kind of day. The pavement's too bright to look at and the sky's unbearably blue and huge and spotless, Richie feels half out of his skin at the shininess of it all. He

looks up at the mountains and imagines the Hollywood sign catching fire, imagines it reflecting all that horrible heat back at the city and burning it to crisp the way his weird cousins used to burn ants with magnifying glasses. Richie feels like those ants right now, skateboarding down his parents' quiet suburban street at midday on a Sunday. He can't fucking escape any of it.

His parents aren't home, and he was counting on that. He uses the key under the fake rock at the bottom of the porch stairs to sneak in to eat some leftovers. Upstairs in his room he sits on the window ledge and has a cigarette to feel like he's got big earth shattering secrets again. The trick to that is that they weren't earth shattering. The smoking and the drinking and the drugs and the sneaking out. None of that was as earth shattering as— whatever this unnamed thing that's got its claws around the base of his skull is. Whatever it is that makes the air feel this heavy.

Outside again, to get away from all the bone shivering nostalgia of his childhood bedroom, he drops into the emptied out pool in their backyard, and lets the familiar and endless curvature of it soothe all his frayed edges.

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**From: Stanley the Manley 9:39 A.M**

*I think I got sick*

**From: Stanley the Manley 9:40 A.M**

*Won't be at breakfast sorry Rich*

See the thing is, Richie really wishes Stan had sent these messages a little earlier. If it had been fifteen minutes ago Richie maybe would've grabbed a to go cup and brought coffee to class instead of coming to the cafeteria. Or even, if it was only ten minutes ago, he would've been able to to cram the rest of his muffin into his mouth and have a leisurely stroll and a cigarette on the way to class.

The problem is that five minutes ago Eddie had walked in and seen

Richie sitting in his and Stan's booth alone, and he'd come over and said *Stan get tired of you?* and Richie had said *actually he's afraid of seeing you again so he's hiding out in his room until I tell him it's safe* and Eddie had said *ha fucking ha asshole, he texted me last night to have breakfast with him* and Richie had said *well by all means then Eds sit down, I'd love to have you for breakfast*. He'd fake gagged but sat down anyway, and thus commenced the strangest, tensest five minutes of Richie's life. And now this: no Stan.

"Hey Eddie—" He glances up to tell Eddie that Stan's not coming, so that they can end this as soon as possible and then forget about it. Unfortunately, Eddie has a smear of peanut butter in the corner of his lip. Richie can't not look at it. "You have something on your face."

Eddie moves to reach for his face and then stops, looking at Richie with furrowed brows and pursed lips.

"I'm not fucking with you it's just right—" Richie gestures on his own face where the peanut butter is. As he goes to finish off his coffee Richie sees out of the corner of his eye the flash of Eddie's pink tongue, where he swipes at the corner of his lips. The peanut butter's still there. "No you— it's just like—" It's not like he can reach out and wipe it off for him but it's so annoying. He just wants it gone so he can stop looking at Eddie's face and mouth.

Using the back of his hand Eddie finally manages to get it off. He wipes the peanut butter from his hand onto the table and thanks Richie through a jaw clenched so tight he swears he can hear it creaking.

"Also, Stan just texted that he's sick so he's not coming." And then Richie gets up with his stuff, "May fate bring us many more breakfasts just like this one." He hopes Eddie has the decency to give him a head start out of the class. He hopes he's watching him leave as he counts down the thirty seconds.

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The sun sets before Richie's done work now, as October pulls them deeper into fall — only in word and not in definition, after all it's Los Angeles: The Place That Seasons Forgot. He skips the part of his day where he eats shit in the 7 Eleven parking lot trying to do nose grinds



on the cement block parking separators, jumps right to the part where he's speeding back to his dorm. His shadow jumps along with him now in the streetlights, instead of trailing behind in rosy evening light.

Where he can he takes a back alley, skirting around dumpsters and Toyotas and vacant lots, needlessly fenced off. A tired cook smoking on the back stoop of a restaurant pulls his feet in and yells at Richie to slow the fuck down as he speeds past. He can't hear him over his music nor the low current of the rumble of wheels against uneven pavement, sending shockwaves up his legs and straight into his chest cavity. He cuts across the whole foods parking lot and through the two near conjoined strip malls just under campus, and then up through the littered houses of the frats and sororities. Fuckin' gag.

He slows down from his breakneck speed turning into one of the darker pathways off the main streets through campus. The shadows of the trees here block what light he could use from the moon and glowing light pollution to see where he's going. He's taking the curve behind Rieber up to Hedrick when suddenly up ahead there is a person heading towards him. It doesn't mean much, people walk everywhere all the time. He's seen 'em. The thing is something is familiar about this scene, almost, just to left of something that's happened before. A motion sensor light triggers on and for a second Richie's blinded, and then it's Eddie walking towards him, defiant and angry already in the face of Richie and his skateboard.

Ripping out his earphones Richie pulls over to the side of the pavement farthest away from Eddie. He does a little bow at him.

"Never fear again Eduardo, I have learned from past mistakes.

"The fact that you had to learn not to run people over says enough."

"You could just thank me!" Richie has to turn around awkwardly to yell this at Eddie as he passes him.

And Eddie's rolling his eyes at him but Richie can only actually assume that, because his board — now slower than the rest of him — catches in a dip in the pavement and he's once again, on this same cursed stretch of pavement, sprawling forward off his feet. Thank god

he skipped the slurpee this time.

From down the laneway he hears the uncontrollable laughter of his arch nemesis, those hiccoughing breathless sort of i'm-gonna-die laughs. He finds himself smiling along with him.

And Richie lies there facing skyward on the pavement behind his dorm, and laughs and laughs and laughs.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

theres real plot in next chapter i promise (bc i think technically this should've been part of the first chapter but whats done is done also its like 9k words whoops)